

FAN FICTION



A PROMISE KEPT

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Summary: Almost two years had gone by since the day Eleven left their lives. Life moved on, but Mike hasn't turned the page yet, still thinking about a way to save her. On a Sunday evening, he gets a sudden call that will give him a chance at saving her.

1. A Promise Kept: Part I - The Call

A PROMISE KEPT

A STRANGER THINGS fanfiction

Stranger Things is a work of fiction created by Matt and Ross Duffer and broadcast by Netflix. The copyrights belong to the rightful copyright holders (The Duffer Brothers, Netflix, etc). This non-lucrative fanfiction story is written by Gregory Michel.

Take note that the story takes place 20 months after the end of season one. This is an alternate fan-made ending to the story of *STRANGER THINGS*. Enjoy reading!

PART I: THE CALL

Summer of 1985. 20 months had already passed since that day; that fateful day. The day when Eleven left their world.

20 months ago, she had sacrificed herself to save her friends. Among them, there was Mike; the one who was, certainly, worth dying for. Of course, that didn't make him happy. Will had been saved by her efforts, but not once after this dreadful day that Mike didn't think that he should have done something.

And 20 months later, he kept thinking as such.

But life went on during that time. It had to.

Will became extremely popular at school as "the boy who came back from death." Luckily he didn't get the popularity get over his head. His place was with his best friends; the ones who turned heaven and hell to find him. The media circus was crazy over his family, but luckily, Hopper and the police force helped keeping them at bay. After what they had been through, God knew how much peace they needed. Troy and James never dared to raise a finger against the boys, or anybody else for that matter. Eleven's passage had completely left a mark on these two; literally on Troy. They were afraid that she would come back if they ever bullied anyone ever.

For the most of it, things remained the same: the countless hours playing *Dungeons & Dragons* in Mike's basement, the love and passion for science, the bicycle rides, etc. The new thing that they were talking about lately was the coming of the most-craved video game console, the NES; short for Nintendo entertainment system. But other than this small teen-like news, it was as if the town of Hawkins had regained its cozy and dull serenity.

On a tranquil and cool evening, Mike and Dustin had one thing in mind: *Back to the Future*! The epic time-travelling box office had been available for two weeks now. It was already a mind-blowing smash hit. The good thing about Sundays evening was the light number of people in movie theaters. It meant full comfort for the feet by using the empty seats as feet rests.

It sucked, as they thought, that Will and Lucas were away. Lucas and his family traveled to New York to visit some relatives. As for the Byers, they were spending two weeks in Florida under its radiant sun. Despite being away, they promised each other they'd go watch the movie together when they'd be reunited again. Nothing beats watching a good movie with best friends.

The duo stormed the screening room no. 4 with haste, excitement and laughs. Doing that attracted the attention of the other people in the room. In simpler terms, three. They raced to the top seats with hands and arms wrapping around buckets of popcorn, bags of juicy candies and large soda pops. Dustin almost tripped, but regained his balance remarkably.

"Got it!" he said.

"You're okay?" asked Mike smiling exciting.

"I would have been pissed if it all fell!" he replied with the same fun.

"No way I'm losing any of this before the movie starts!"

"Let's get our seats before you actually do."

"Not funny, Mike!" He said. Mike had a chuckle at his warning.

The previews for the upcoming movies started a few instants after

they sat. The preview session was 15 to 20 minutes, but it was always good to never miss it. Their passion for the sci-fi genre bloomed when seeing the trailer for *Aliens* and *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*. Few other movies for the next year were shown in the previews. Dustin watched them while his mouth savored the delicious popcorn in big portions. Mike, too.

Mike's attention got diverted to the young couple sitting some rows in front of them. They must have been his age. A wave of nostalgia took hold of him like a breeze that was neither cold nor warm. Eleven appeared in his mind; the first image he had ever gotten to her, her first smile, her tears... his kiss with her. A small smile rose at the corner of his lips as he refocused on the big screen. That smile, though, wasn't happiness. He was enjoying his time with Dustin, he really was. Deep down, a pinch of regret stung in him not being able to share moments like that with Eleven. Just like that couple below.

The movie finally started with grandiose soundtrack. The boys exchanged fist bumps as excitement. Luckily for Mike, his saddened thoughts had washed away. At least, for the time being.

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"Dude, this movie was aaaaaawesome!" Dustin yelled in glee. The best friends were riding their bicycles home, hearts filled with great *Back to the Future* moments.

"I know, right?" said Mike. "And you know there's going to be a sequel with that ending!"

"Talk about the best cliffhanger!" said Dustin. "I bet Marty's kids are in deep shit in the future! Like they're going to be executed for a crime they didn't commit or something!"

"Or they became so evil that they're ruling the world, and Marty and Doc must travel through time to stop them from turning bad!"

"That'd be so cool!" Dustin said louder.

Laughs and crazy theories went back and forth between them. One of them even implied aliens from space and resurrected dinosaurs from

the ice age. The boys were very enthusiastic on this quiet Sunday evening after this movie. This memory would definitely last for the rest of their lives. More than everything else, Mike needed that. Otherwise, his mind would have been about Eleven during the entire movie. Considering how her disappearance occurred, the memories were never good.

The boys walked alongside their bikes as they were back in their neighborhood. A moment of silence had been sitting between them for a few minutes. It wasn't as if they didn't know what to talk about anymore; the topics just never lasted more than a few minutes. Despite Dustin's efforts to keep a conversation afloat, Mike would cut its life support in a matter of a minute or two.

Dustin knew too well what was in his best friend's mind at the moment. Just like every single day.

"I miss her too, man," he said.

"What?" Mike replied.

Dustin cocked his head to the side. "Come on, Mike. You know *what!*"

"Sorry," Mike smiled a bit.

"I saw you kept creeping on the couple in front of us before the movie started."

"I wasn't creeping!" said Mike defensively. "That's gross!"

"Okay, but you wish you and Eleven could have been like that, right?"

"Well, I..." Mike hesitated, and then sighed.

Mike knew how he felt for her. Dustin, Lucas and Will knew. Nancy knew. His parents, Joyce, Jonathan, even Hopper knew. Everyone knew.

But he never admitted it. Not once. The words never came out of his lips. He didn't want to waste the words to thin air. He wanted her to hear them first. Admitting it without her around; he felt that doing so

would be so empty and in vain. This was his vow; letting her know these words first, or spending his life never revealing this secret with his own breath.

"I wanted to go to the Upside Down," Mike finally said. "I wanted to go after her."

"I know..." Dustin said sympathizing with him. "We all did."

"But the bad men tore down the entire building by blowing it up," Mike added, "calling it a 'freak accident'. What a pile of bull! And nothing could have been done afterwards!"

"They're the government," Dustin said. "Lying is their shitty specialty."

That last detail had always angered the young Wheeler son. There were no words that could concretize his hate towards these "government bastards" as he frequently quoted them. Shortly after the events of '83, Mike was adamant to sneak into the facility to look for Eleven. Unfortunately, it was obvious that whoever was responsible for a place filled with such dark secrets wouldn't let it go public. And so, fire became their solution. Everything disappeared in ashes; along with the only remaining gate to the Upside Down.

"Government bastards!" Mike said in discontent. It must have been the 1000th time he used these words to define them.

"You'll find her, definitely," Dustin said in a rather reassuring and confident way. Mike looked at him with questioning eyes. "What?"

"You sure sound confident," he said.

"Will you ever give up on her?" Dustin asked.

"What? Never! Hell no!"

"There you go, that's why," Dustin said, satisfied of his best friend's answer. "She's one of the biggest reasons why Will is back to us alive and well. Trust me when I say this; she put her life upfront for us, so will the rest of us."

Dustin tapped his fist on Mike's shoulder, "So stop mopping around

on your own, dude! You're not alone in this, okay? Trust my gut! We'll find a way to get her back from the Upside Down." He tapped his stomach.

Mike breathed a laugh of relief, "Thanks Dustin." This one replied with his signature smile. Yeah, that Dustin-smile.

There wasn't any leader among the boys, but Dustin was the pillar among them. When everything was down and sad, he was that spark that shined through with his smile and his few words of morale boost. Tonight, these elements did their magic onto his best friend.

Mike was newly confident that he'd find Eleven again.

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Mike finally got home. He unlocked the door and lit the entrance up. The Wheeler home echoed his steps to the kitchen. His parents were away for a week at a summer camp with his little sister, Holly. Mike and Nancy decided to sit this one out, feeling too old for it.

As Mike took a slice of blueberry pie and a glass of milk, a note on the fridge told Nancy's younger brother that she was staying at Steve's. Mike got along well with her boyfriend, but he could never tell his sister that he preferred Jonathan. After the events of '83, he thought they connected more. He dismissed these thoughts whispering in his mind, *It's her life*.

His room; there was a major change that made him hopeful. Two beds were in it. One for Mike of course, the other was reserved for El. It was well-preserved, covered with clean and colorful matching sheets and pillows.

After Will's rescue, a long discussion from Mike's parents happened. They had decided to take Eleven in if she was ever to come back someday. Karen was thankful to the psychic girl after she'd saved her son. She felt that she deserved a home and family she never had. Mike was happy to hear this news when told, but was beyond embarrassed when her mother mentioned the no-hanky-panky rule.

He sat by the window gazing at the stars. One among them shined

brighter than the other lot; the North Star, always guiding through the darkness. He wondered if Eleven could see the same stars from the Upside Down. More than anything, he wished her well and prayed silently for her.

"Just hold on," he said. "I'll come for you. Somehow."

On the edge of the window laid an old, but still functioning compass and his walkie-talkie. The compass pointed north towards the star. Looking at these items brought him back those memories of their adventure. They were kids and they went through some nasty stuff, some things that adults wouldn't even go near of. (Well, *some* adults would.)

He held the compass in his hand and squeezed his in his palm. Dustin's words had motivated him, but at the end of the road, he needed a clue. He needed a way to find El and save her. If only she could send him a message from there, maybe he could do something, anything.

Mike put the compass back on the window's ledge. He frowned at its sight thinking he might have broken it. But it looked intact. The compass was perfectly okay.

Weirdly, it pointed... east.

The walkie-talkie became alive with rough and loud static. It was like wild electricity wanted to speak.

The compass pointing east, the walkie-talkie coming alive; a coincidence?. Mike didn't want to get his hopes up. But those two small happenings defined actions by one person he held dear in his heart.

He slowly took the device in his hand. He pressed the button.

"Hello?" he asked.

Static again.

"Hello? Who is this?"

Static answered once more, but with a voice. A voice that was out of breath, scared and stressed.

The sound of that breath shook him. He was now holding the device with both hands, trembling. It was just breath, but he knew that voice too darn well. He knew.

"Eleven!" He finally said. "Is that you?" Concrete concern escaped his lips.

Seconds passed, but definitely the longest of his life. And then, the out-of-breath voice replied with one word.

One word Mike had been waiting for a very long time.

"Mike..." Eleven said through the static.

To be continued...

2. A Promise Kept: Part II - The Rescue

PART II: THE RESCUE

Mike never acted so hastily in his life before.

After hearing her call his name, he contacted Dustin and explaining him what had happened in just 15 seconds. He knew that saving Eleven might put him on the same path as facing the Demogorgon. Eleven did destroy it, but maybe it survived. Worse, who was to say that it was the only one of its kind? A sling shot wouldn't cut it this time.

As he rode in high horses on his bike towards the rendezvous point with Dustin, his backpack was loaded and prepared. There was no way in his mind that he'd come back home without her.

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Dustin and Mike walked in the woods, the same ones where they tried finding Will when he disappeared. The compass was leading them there.

"She must have opened a gate," Mike said. "But why didn't she do it before?"

"Remember what Mr. Clarke said," Dustin replied, "it takes a large amount of energy to pierce through dimensions."

"We gotta hurry!" Mike started jogging towards the direction the compass pointed. "The last time she used that much energy, she was defenseless!"

"Right behind you, dude!" Dustin jogged as well. "And by the way, 'told you I was right!"

"About what?"

Dustin tapped his stomach, "Trust my gut! I told you you'd find her, didn't I?"

Mike smiled to his comment. He did say it. "I owe you one. Big time!"

"No you don't, that's what best friends do for each other! Now let's go find your princess!"

Princess; The sound of that word embarrassed Mike, but it made him smile. He didn't protest about it. After all, everyone knew by now how he felt for her.

The compass led the boys into a deep area of the forest. The needle spun around tirelessly. They had reached their destination. They didn't see anything that remotely looked like a gate. Mike tried to contact Eleven, but static was the only answer. Nevertheless, the static did increase a notch on their arrival to the destination.

Waving their hands trying to see if it was an invisible portal in midair? It didn't work. Looking into the earthy ground? Even less. No portal in sight.

Then it hit Mike. "Wait a minute..."

"Did you find it?" asked Dustin.

"Nancy told me that when she was trying to find Barb with Jonathan," he explained, "she had stumbled on a gate around this same spot."

"And where was it?"

"At the base of..."

Mike turned hearing a gurgling noise. He followed it along with Dustin.

The boys didn't know what to think of their finding. One thing was for sure, it wasn't natural. The way Nancy had described it to Mike couldn't compare to the real thing that stared at their stunned faces.

"...tree." Mike said.

A wide and large hole was at the base of a tree's trunk. It was covered with slimy cobwebs. Its inside pulsed with a gurgling sound and a

shade of rotten crimson that glowed strangely. The boys knelt to have a closer look. They could barely see the other side, but they knew its destination.

The Upside Down.

And Eleven was there, waiting. Finally.

Mike put down his overloaded backpack and unzipped it. He started unpacking the items he took from home: a large ball of thin rope, a small gallon of gasoline, matches and two axes.

"Someone came prepared," said Dustin.

"Didn't you?" asked Mike.

"Well..." Dustin unzipped his backpack and gave Mike some snacks, "For Eleven."

"For Eleven?"

"Don't you think she's gonna be drained after opening that portal?"

"Good point," Mike concluded taking the snacks. This one gave Dustin an axe. "Here's the plan: I'm going in there to find El. To make sure I don't get lost, tie the rope around me so I can be able to find my way back."

"You think it will be enough?" Dustin said, looking at the ball of rope that was bigger than a basketball.

"I just hope I won't have to go far enough."

"And what's the gasoline for?" Dustin asked.

"Before I go in," Mike said, "we'll spray it on the tree. There's no telling that the Demogorgon won't follow us."

"Yeah, Eleven did blast that son of a bitch, but we don't know if it survived or they are more of its kind."

"That's why as soon we come back, you light up the tree and burn it."

We must make sure that bastard can never cross to our world ever again."

"And if it does," Dustin tapped the axe in his palm, "we'll take care of it; permanently!"

"Right!" Mike affirmed.

Dustin tied the rope around Mike's waist. The rope was sturdy as they tested it. There was a lot of rope to travel with; they hoped that they'd be enough to find El before Mike would run out of it. But their worries weren't aimed at the rope's length for the moment.

"All set," Dustin said.

"Thanks," Mike told him. "You're gonna be okay on your own?"

"Dude, you're the one going to the freaking Upside Down; I should be asking you that."

He laughed. "Yeah. I know, right?"

"Well," Dustin said, "go get our superhero back, okay? I'll stand guard."

"Count on it!" he slapped hands with his best friend and hugged before plunging into the unknown.

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The Upside Down. Calling it a dark world would be an understatement.

Flashing the way, Mike walked slowly into this unknown dimension. The trees were bleak, the ground felt dry and lifeless, and there was this aura of perpetual night going on in this world. There was this strange snow that was delicately and slowly falling. It resembled snow, but it sure didn't feel like it.

As much as he wanted to continue his slow pacing, he knew that Eleven needed his help. He started jogging. So far, the rope held on.

"El?" he shouted with a low voice. "Eleven?" No answer.

He held his axe tightly. God knew the danger that could creep on him in an instant. But his resolution was made; he wouldn't leave here without Eleven.

He had been walking for half an hour now. He finally reached a familiar building; the school. He was surprised there was enough rope to lead him there. He jogged faster towards it. It clicked in his mind that El's last standoff with the monster was at the school. Perhaps she was still in here.

This time, Mike couldn't care less about silence. He had to shout.

"ELEVEEEEEEN!" he shouted. "WHERE ARE YOU?"

His walkie-talkie screamed in static. He grabbed it in haste.

"Mike..." Eleven's voice; she sounded desperate. "Mike...?"

"I'm here! I'm at the school! Are you there?" he shouted back. "Eleven?"

A moment of silence sat for long seconds. Then, a light flickered in one of the windows on the upper floor. It flickered fast, but just fast enough for him to catch its glimpse. Mike didn't need any convincing. He started running Eleven's location, but a force held him back at his waist.

"No, not now!" he said. That was it; end of the rope. He grabbed his walkie-talkie. "Dustin, do you read? Over!" Static answered the call. It was no surprise. They were in another dimension after all.

Eleven didn't have much time. Mike did the only thing he could do. It was a crazy thing to do, but for her sake, it had to be done. He swung his axe and cut the rope. He tied the loose end around a fence's pole to make sure he'd find his way back. Hopefully the Demogorgon wouldn't think about cutting it, Mike thought.

He pushed the doors open quietly. The school was the exact replica of the one of his world, but it was a destroyed mess. Floors and walls were cracked, rotten moister all over the place, trash littered

everywhere and a dim lit that barely lit up the halls; it was even darker than the way Will had described it. He knew the school like the back of his hand luckily; that was the good news. The bad one? A gurgling and beast-like murmur echoed through the corridors. The monster was there. Playing it silently would now be a good call, Mike considered.

He reached the floor. The door to it wasn't there anymore. That was good; less needed attention from the menace. He peeked to the side. The sound of that gurgling monster seemed closer. Mike held his axe so hard that he could have snapped the wooden handle. He tiptoed through the hall that was filled with cracked ceramic tiles and cracked walls. The flickering neon lights seemed to lead to where Eleven was. Mike prayed countlessly that she was okay.

An intersection was met. He peeked slightly left, but was met by a disgusting roar. The Demogorgon. Mike retracted his head and held his breath. The monster lurked around the closed doors. Eleven was there and it felt it. If it found out she was in the room, she was dead for sure.

A label-less round can was near Mike's right foot. It was risky, but he needed a diversion; that can would do the trick.

He grabbed it quietly. He walked near the intersection. The monster still had its back turned. Mike swung the can to the stairs that lay in front of him. The can kept tumbling down the staircase and the monster rushed towards it without giving a glimpse towards Mike's side. It growled all the way downstairs as his roar was fading in the silence. It was gone, for now.

Mike ran to the third door on the left. His heart racing, he turned the knob quietly and pushed the heavy door to enter.

Flickering lights lit the room dimly. The entire classroom was also messy; destroyed desks, a largely cracked blackboard and the usual rotten moisture creeping on the walls.

"Eleven?" Mike called. "Eleven, are you there?"

A metallic creaking sound broke the silence. It came from the large

metal cabinet. Its doors slowly opened. A shallow breath followed.

Mike turned around slowly to look at the steps coming from behind him. His axe was ready to be swung. But when his eyes met the origin, his hands suddenly lost their grip over the weapon.

She had outgrown the pink dress along with the blue jacket, her clothes had lost their vibrant colors of once before, there was a slight lost of weight that she endured during her time here, most of her skin, very pale, was covered in dirt stains, but the most significant change was her hair that were as long as that blond wig she once had. They were as messy as a bird's nest.

What captured Mike the most was her eyes. They remained the same, innocent, caring and brave eyes he saw from her since the first day they met each other. Although they seem to have lost a lot of their warmth, he'd recognize those anywhere. And now, those eyes were heavily watery.

"Mike?" Eleven whispered. Her legs were about to collapse.

"Eleven!" Mike couldn't believe it was her. He ran to her and held her in his arms tight. She let herself fall in his welcoming arms.

"Mike!" Eleven squeezed her arms around him like her life depended on it. Tears rolling on her cheeks, she sobbed incredibly in his neck. Mike was so happy that tears were also shed as well. But boys will be boys; he wiped them, wanting to be strong for her.

He wanted to stay like that forever, but he knew better than to remain here when a bloodthirsty monster was on the loose. He reluctantly cut the reunion to give Eleven some snack bars. "From Dustin, he thought you'd be..." Eleven didn't loose time snatching and eating them. The three bars were engulfed in record time. Mike wasn't surprised. Food looked incredibly scarce in this dimension.

"I've distracted the Demogorgon," Mike said, "but we have to leave now! Can you run?"

Eleven frenetically nodded her head. "Yes."

"Okay, let's go!" Mike picked up his axe in one hand and Eleven's in

the other. Both of their grips were strong and tight.

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The entrance door was in sight. A sense of semi-relief took Mike's heart. But he couldn't rest as long as they were in the Upside Down. From Eleven's held hand, he could feel her trembling. Mike couldn't even begin to imagine the hell and torment she went through during these months. He gave her a reassuring squeeze. He swore to himself he'd never let her live all alone.

He pushed the entrance doors open. The rope was still attached to the pole. The gate was still open. The couple ran towards it, but the Demogorgon stopped them in their track. A hellish roar escaped his hole of a mouth.

In a swift move of raw and pent-up anger, Mike rushed towards it and swung his axe at the monster. His aim was true as he cut off clean one of the monster's petal lips. It screamed in pain. Mike swung again, but he wasn't lucky as the first strike. The monster swapped him away. He slid back to the entrance stairs of the school.

"Mike!" Eleven screamed. She ran to his side. "Are you okay?"

The monster ran towards them. The kill was imminent. But Eleven had something to say about that. In a burst of power, she pinned the monster to a wall. She pressured so hard that it flew through the wall and ended back in the school, under a pile of rumbles. But that stunt drained her as she fell on her knees.

"El!" Mike called for her as he ran to her side. "Eleven, you're okay?"

Her nose was bleeding. She nodded to Mike's question, but he knew better. She wasn't okay. He pulled her on his back. "We're gonna make it, you hear me? We're almost home!"

Though Eleven nodded weakly, her arms held firmly around Mike's neck. She wasn't going to give up. She had faith in Mike and she was going to do her impossible to reach the finish line together.

Mike had been running for an insane time. He kept on shaking the rope, signaling Dustin they were coming back.

A huge smile drew on his face. The gate; he saw it.

"DUSTIIIN!" he screamed. "WE'RE ALMOST THERE!"

Only a few meters separated them from home.

BOOM! The final obstacle came between them once again; the Demogorgon was back. And it looked wrathful like hell had broken loose.

Both Mike and Eleven were frozen in desperation. Mike couldn't put Eleven down; she was too tired to run. He couldn't battle the monster by himself. And if Eleven tried using her powers, this could cost her life once and for all. They were running out of options.

The gate was just there, only a few meters away. But against the wall that the Demogorgon was, it was impossible to get through.

A sudden sound of metal plunging into flesh cut through the beast's snarling. It creamed painfully as it fell down and turned around. An axe was deeply planted right into his spinal cord. Mike and Eleven stared at their hero, Dustin, standing in front of the portal.

"What are you guys waiting for? Christmas? Move!" Dustin shouted!

Dustin went through the gate first. He grabbed the matches and readied to light the tree in flames. Eleven followed. Once on the other side, she leaned herself to another tree to rest her strength. Mike quickly followed.

"Dustin!" Mike said frenetically. "Now!"

The Demogorgon's arm grabbed Mike's ankle to pull him back.

"Mike!" Dustin grabbed his arm dropping the matches.

"Mike!" Eleven grabbed the other to pull him back.

They pulled him as hard as they could, but the monster was stronger with just one arm. Their combined strength was failing. Eleven focused on the monster's arm. More blood fell from her nose and ears. She screamed putting her focus at its height and snapped the

Demogorgon's arm in half. An anguishing scream erupted from the other side as it pulled back its broken limb.

Mike ran clear from the gate while Dustin captured the matches. A flare instantly lit up and was thrown at the tree to finally set it into vivid flames. The three friends stared into the fire as the gate was closing, hearing the final screams of the beast.

The nightmare was finally over.

Eleven was cradled in Mike's arms as she held his hand; Dustin sat on the other side as he held the other. Despite the horrible evening they went through, they couldn't help smiling at their accomplished mission. Tears were about to fall from this joyful and long-awaited reunion.

"We made it," said Dustin.

"Thanks to you," Mike added. "Thank you for saving us."

Eleven squeezed Dustin's hand. "Thank you."

He looked at her with his signature smile. "Welcome home, Eleven."

To be continued...

3. A Promise Kept: Part III - The Promise

PART III: THE PROMISE

Mike was standing outside of the bathroom while the shower was running with Eleven in it. Dustin had gone home. Mike insisted that he'd sleep over at his house, but the Henderson kid simply replied, "I think you and Eleven need some *alone* time together." On that, the best friends went their separated ways until tomorrow.

Mike was happy that she was able to save Eleven. He couldn't wait to tell everyone that she was back. But despite the happiness he had, he kept imagining the horror that she went through on her own. He wanted to know what had happened since then. But doing so might open some old wounds.

The door opened. "Mike?" Eleven said quietly.

He turned his head towards her. It left him breathless.

After a good shower and some fresh clothes, a short-sleeve white shirt and some marine-blue sweatpants, Eleven had regained her colors, from paleness to a soft and warm pink shade. Her dark hair had a slight auburn glow to the house lights. They were still wet from her shower; it gave her a layer of newfound beauty. Mike found her pretty since the first day he met her, but now he found her beautiful. He was mesmerized by it. Or perhaps it was due to the fact he hadn't seen her for almost two years. One or the other, he loved what he saw.

"I like your hair," Mike said.

Eleven touched her longer hair, "Pretty?"

"Beautiful," he smiled saying.

She smiled timidly as her left hand played with a lock of her hair. Mike would never get tired of this look; her smiling, blushing, but above all, her being at ease, safe and sound. No more she would need to fight monsters and go that extra mile for her friends' sake.

He hugged her. Eleven didn't question the gesture. She accepted it as he was holding her dearly in his arms. In this moment, his sense of protectiveness became solidified with a newfound resolve. He never wanted her to sacrifice herself ever again. He'd make sure to do the protecting from now on, no matter what.

He led her to his bedroom. She noticed the changes, but the one that caught her attention was the second bed paralleled to Mike's. She looked at him for confirmation; he smiled and nodded to her.

"It's your home now," he said. "No more sleeping in the basement."

"Thank you," she smiled back.

Mike sat on his bed with Eleven sitting next to him. They both shared the remaining half of the blueberry pie with milk. Not much was said during the time; if not, nothing at all. The events of the night were still fresh in their minds. In moments as such, Mike thought silence would be the best company. But through that silence, they would glimpse at each other and smile, even blush. The quietness didn't need words to describe the atmosphere. Both of them had waited a long time to be in such ambiance.

One thing was missing, and it annoyed Mike's mind. Those words; the ones he wanted to tell her.

He was here all alone with her. There wasn't going to be a better timing than now. But was it a good idea to bother her with such a thing? After everything she went through? Mike was pulled apart from his inner dilemma: speak now or hold his peace for another day.

"Mike?" Eleven called him.

He turned to her. "Yes?"

"What's a... girlfriend?" she asked cluelessly.

The Wheeler teenager turned a new shade of red upon hearing the word.

"I heard Dustin saying it to you on the way home. What does it mean?"

This was his cue. There would never be a better opening than this moment. Again, Eleven saved him; this time on the emotional level.

He put away his empty plate and took a deep breath. It was all or nothing.

"Remember the last time, when I told you about the Snow Ball?"

"Yes?"

"Well," he scratched the side of his head, "what I wanted to say is... before I kissed you..."

"Kiss?"

"That thing we did..." Mike blushed harder as he pointed his lips, "with our lips..."

"Oh..." The vivid memory of her first kiss from Mike flashed in her eyes. Her face blushed remembering the sweet and lovely sensation. Reminiscing this precious moment dressed her lips with a timid smile.

"Anyway," Mike continued, "you go at the Snow Ball with someone that you don't only like... but that you also love, like a special one."

"A special one?"

"Yeah. I mean, I love my best friends, I love my mom and dad, my sisters. But a special one, it's someone you love the most above all. And..." he hesitated on the next word.

"Yes?" Eleven yearned to know the next words.

"The way I feel about you," he said, "it's like loving a special one."

"I'm your special one?"

Mike nodded. "What I'm trying to say is..."

And finally, he took the ultimate plunge.

"Eleven... I love you."

She remembered her first kiss with Mike. For some reason, that confession felt a thousand times better. Those three words bloomed in her like a volcano of raw emotion. Her heartbeat pounded hard and loud, her breath accelerated and her face lit up like the sun. Happiness, joy, love; as powerful those words were, they didn't even begin to describe how Eleven felt at the moment.

But one thing was certain; she felt whole, completed.

"And," Mike continued, "I was wondering if you'd like... to be my girlfriend."

The moment was tense for Mike. She didn't know how she would answer to his confession. He had a clue when looking at her warm face that shined like a Christmas tree. Yet he needed to hear it; hopefully a good answer would come out of her lips.

She approached him a little. "Mike?"

"Yeah?"

Eleven didn't say anything else. She looked passionately into his eyes. They were warm, sweet, strong and so caring. She adored him, possibly more than anything in this world. Mike Wheeler, the first one who was ever nice to her and treated her like a person. Tonight, he was the one who crossed dimensions to save her. And now, in this instant, he was her world.

It was her turn to take the leap.

She closed the gap between them. Swiftly and romantically, her lips joined his, giving him the answer he desired for so long.

Eleven pulled apart, while Mike's face was the definition of a thousand lights of love sparkling.

"I love you too, Mike." She smiled adorably.

He was fourteen, but the smile and giggle he let out was as if he was four. It was embarrassing, but Mike didn't care, neither did Eleven. They were together; that was what counted the most for the moment. She loved him, he loved her, and considering the dangers they both

braved for the sake of each other, they would do it one more time if it had to be done again.

Eleven yawned loudly and tiredly. Mike replicated the gesture, feeling himself drained as well from the exhausting evening. Rescuing by crossing dimensions wasn't a walk in the park after all. She saw her bed waiting for her. Although it looked very comfortable, she didn't feel like going there just yet. After spending almost two years in the Upside Down, she felt uneasy to sleep alone. She squeezed Mike's sleeve as he met his eyes. He understood right away.

The lamp was shut. A beautiful moonlight pierced through the curtain and loomed over the young couple. Eleven held onto Mike like her life depended on it. Her craving for human warmth was raw and genuine. It was no surprise coming from someone who survived the Upside Down for almost two years. She needed that. She wanted to feel that all of it was real; the feeling of home and safety, and most of all, love. Mike returned the squeezing affection. He would make sure she would never suffer again. Whether it was to make her smile every single day, or to defend her against a Demogorgon, he promised he would be there for her.

"Eleven?" Mike said.

"Yes?" She answered.

"I'll never ever let anything bad happen to you ever. I'll never lose you again."

She smiled reassuringly to his word. "Promise?"

"Promise."

THE END